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DE RUEHNE #3030/01 3361216
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 011216Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4456
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 1690
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7234

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 003030

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR: PEACEFUL POLLING CONTINUES
AMIDST MUMBAI ATTACKS

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[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2987
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[1](#)M. NEW DELHI 1684

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Voters in Jammu and Kashmir went to the polls in record numbers on November 30, and for the third time in a row, defied separatists' calls for an election boycott. The high turnout for phase three of the state assembly elections was all the more impressive as it came amidst the terror attacks in Mumbai (Ref A). The 62 percent turnout rate easily bested the 55 percent for round one (Ref B) and fell just short of matching the 65 percent recorded for round two (Ref C). The five seats contested in round three comprise the Kupwara district in the northern Kashmir Valley. Media and embassy contacts reported peaceful and fair polling with no reports of coercion or violence. Police put down one minor anti-election protest without incident. Four more phases remain with the final votes to be cast on December 24, and results to be announced after counting on December 28. End Summary.

High Turnout Rate Continues

[1](#)2. (SBU) The 62 percent voter turnout in the November 30 third round of the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly elections mirrored the high rates of the first two phases. Four of the five constituencies saw significantly higher turnout rates than the previous 2002 assembly elections, with one seat about even. Neither the freezing cold nor the boycott calls of separatists kept voters from the long lines at polling stations. As Tahir Mohiuddind, editor of the vernacular newspaper Chattan, told Poloff, "People separate Azadi (freedom) from elections, (separatist group) Hurriyat does not understand this." Residents of Jammu and Kashmir still want good local governance.

[1](#)3. (U) After polls closed on November 30, the state's Deputy Election Commissioner announced a tentative turnout of 62 percent in the five constituencies combined. Seventy-one candidates including 31 independents vied for the votes of an approximate electorate of 336,000 in the five northern Kashmir assembly seats. On November 23 six constituencies

went to the polls (Ref B) while ten constituencies went to the polls on November 17 (Ref C). The remaining 66 contests will be held in four additional phases over the next four weeks. Results will be declared for all seats shortly after counting on December 28.

Peaceful Polling Continues

14. (SBU) Authorities maintained a heavy security presence, and it appears to have paid off. Media reported no serious violence, although rival party supporters did skirmish in a few villages. Izhar Wani of the AFP described the polling as "normal, peaceful." As with the first two rounds of voting, security forces completely locked down Srinagar. Shopkeepers closed for the day and the police reportedly questioned every driver on the highway connecting Srinagar to the five voting constituencies in northern Kashmir.

Mumbai Not a Factor; So Far So Good

15. (SBU) Comment: The terrorist attacks in Mumbai did not have an effect on turnout rates. Prior to the first round of voting, some analysts predicted turnout rates as low as ten percent. But voters continue to turn out in record numbers. According to embassy contacts, Mumbai was clearly on the minds of voters, but assembly elections - even in Jammu and Kashmir - are a local affair. Voters have decided to make their voices heard. The peaceful elections represent a small but important piece of good news for GOI in what has been a

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very bad week on the security front. Four more rounds remain, and especially after the violence Mumbai, no one in the GOI will breathe a sigh of relief until the election cycle is complete. End Comment.

16. (U) Tentative voter turnout numbers in phase three. All contests in phase three were in the Kashmir Valley.

District	Voter Turnout (%)	
	2008	2002
Karnah	79	65
Lolab	64	47
Kupwara	61	55
Handwara	59	51
Langate	54	54

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